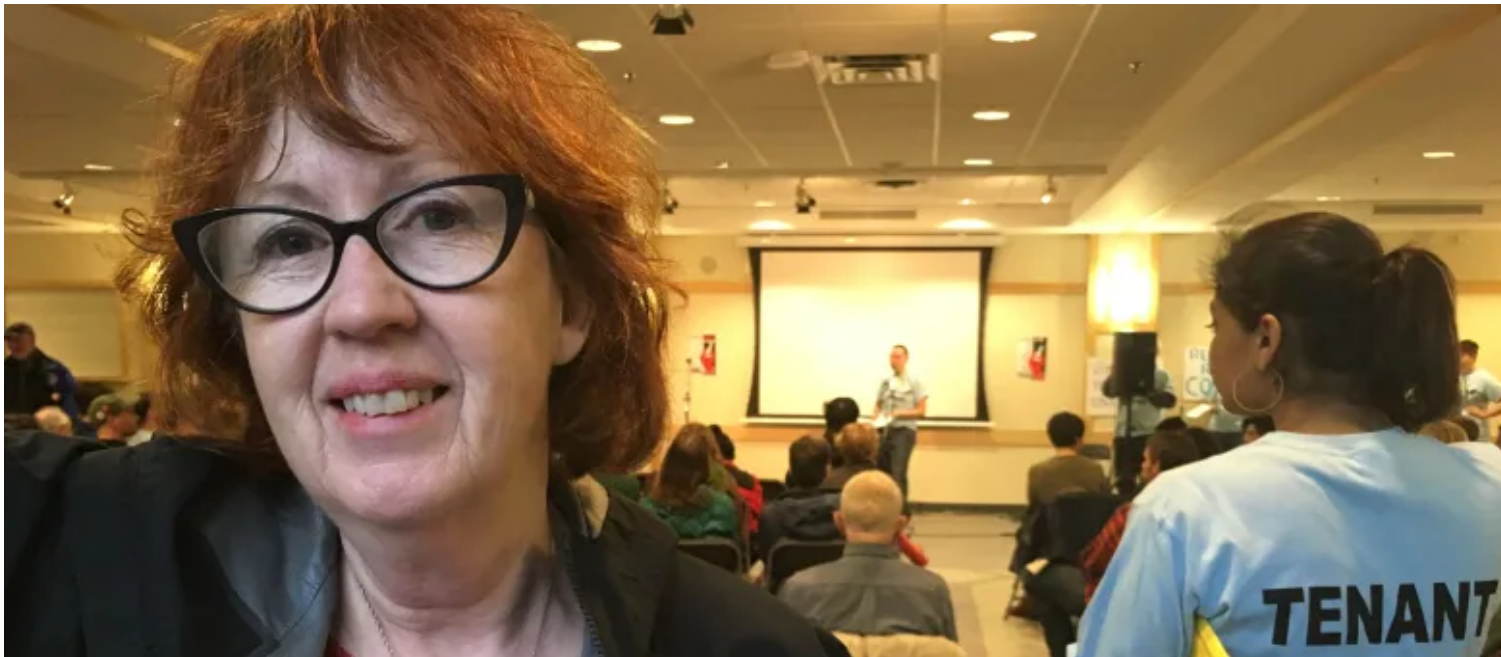


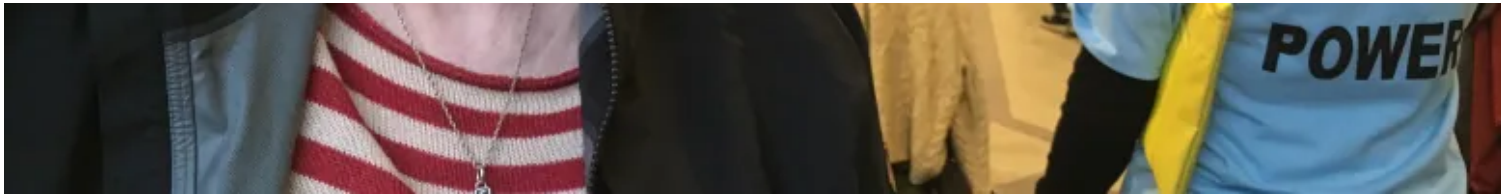
British Columbia

## Power to the renter: Vancouver Tenants Union hopes to put rep in every building

Organization signs up members for \$1 a year to advocate for renters across the city

[Chad Pawson](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 29, 2017 9:36 PM PT | Last Updated: April 30, 2017





Mount Pleasant renter Debra Dawson attended the launch of the Vancouver Tenants' Union after receiving an eviction notice on Monday, April 24th, 2017. (Chad Pawson/CBC)

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The [Vancouver Tenants Union](#) says its ready to represent renters across the city, and hopes to sign up thousands of members to be a collective voice for residents facing eviction and unfair rent increases.



Dozens of renters in Vancouver listened to stories of eviction problems, lack of appropriate housing and what can be done about it at launch for a collective group called the Vancouver Tenants' Union on Saturday, April

"Just to build tenant power," said Derrick O'Keefe, a volunteer with the newly formed group. "Tenants are feeling very precarious and just feeling one paycheck away or one renoviction away from losing their homes."

He, along with other members, formally launched the group at a public event on Saturday at a church in Mount Pleasant, and wore baby-blue t-shirts with an emblem of a fist raised and the words, 'tenant power,' on the back of them.



O'Keefe and his wife live in Vancouver's Fairview neighbourhood and have moved five times in the past six years since their first of two sons were born.

"We all feel precarious ... isolated," he said of renters in the city. According to 2011 Canadian census data, [60 per cent of Vancouver's housing is made up of apartment buildings](#).

"Even if you have neighbours ... you can complain about the landlords, but you are powerless, unless you have access to legal advice ... it all feels very cumbersome when a problem comes up."

The union's goals include advocating for rental control that is tied to units, meaning rents wouldn't increase when people leave.



It also wants to get a contact person or tenant organizer in every rental building in the city, have thousands of paying members to help fund legal advice, and organize tenants to protect them from "threats, intimidation and bribes that lead to the loss of their homes."

"People are afraid," said Debra Dawson who attended the launch and has for the past 22 years rented an apartment in a building in Mount Pleasant.

“I'm fighting it of course and I'm really mad.”

*- Mount Pleasant resident Debra Dawson after receiving an eviction notice.*

She received an eviction notice on Monday, notifying her that she would have to move out because the landlord wants to renovate the building.

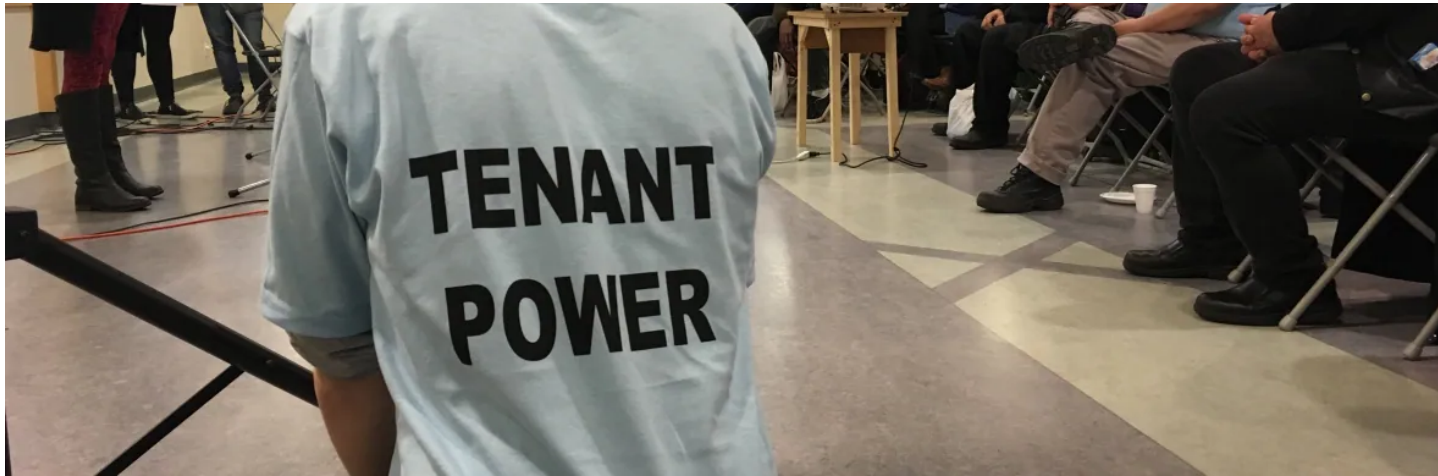
Dawson says she went to city hall to see if an application for renovations for the building had been filed. She says none exist.

"I was just floored because there's nothing wrong with my place really," she said. "And I'm fighting it of course and I'm really mad."

She says not all renters are willing to fight problems through the province's [Residential Tenancy Branch](#), which is the authority for hearing all disputes between landlords and tenants under the [Residential Tenancy Act](#).







A volunteer with the Vancouver Tenants' Union wearing one of the organization's t-shirts. It hopes to represent thousands of renters across the city for an annual membership fee of \$1/year. (Chad Pawson/CBC)

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That's where the union hopes to come in by fielding calls from renters who have problems, giving them someone to talk to, making lawyers available and providing support to encourage them to solve the problem, rather than just move on.

"The idea would be a union rep in every building, so if you're having a problem you know who to talk to," said O'Keefe.

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